Another Stray

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Another Stray

by justheretoreadhannibalfics

Summary

Will Graham has a soft spot for strays. That apparently extends to lost teenage girls he stumbles across in the woods. She might not talk much, but Will doesn't demand much from company, rare as it is. He's just killing time while he waits for Hannibal to visit again.

The Girl

“What might you be doing out here?”

The girl swung around, brandishing a knife at Will. He tipped his head curiously and shifted his bag on his shoulder.

She looked as if she had been wandering through the forest for days. Her face was covered in dirt, as were her clothes, and her hands were covered in scratches from either thorns or rocks if she had tripped. The way she looked at him had Will convinced she was running away from something or someone. She was frightened, and frightened animals were the most dangerous. Add to that the knife she held, and the fact she seemed to know very well how to use it, and Will would have to be careful how he proceeded.

Will sighed and set his bag down on the ground, crouching so he could sift through the herbs and things he had been gathering.

“I’m not about to hurt you,” he said, keeping his head down so she wouldn’t think he was a threat, “if you don’t want my help, just be on your way and I won’t stop you. But if you’re hungry and could use some medical attention, come over here. I have some bread, and if you come back to my home I can make soup.”

The girl hesitated, but when Will pulled the loaf from the bag and unwrapped the cloth from around it, she put her knife into her belt and shuffled closer. Will could tell she was still apprehensive, but apparently she was hungry enough she was being forced to prioritize.

The girl didn’t come all the way up to Will, keeping her distance in what Will thought was probably a smart move on her part if she really was running from someone, but he held out the loaf and she snatched it from his hand. She took a few steps away once she had the bread, but didn’t retreat to her original distance from him. Will considered that a small victory, so he settled on his haunches and studied her for a moment.

She ate quickly, but not like an animal. She still had some dignity, and Will could admire that. She kept her cloak clutched close around her, a shield from the world. It was likely the only thing she had to keep her warm at night. Her boots were worn from walking. Will might be able to help her with that as well.

“My offer stands,” Will told her gently, “I can treat those scrapes so they don’t fester, and I can make you some soup. That would mean you have to come back with me.”

Will let that sit in the air for a moment, but the girl didn’t reply.

“Or, you can be on your way and I can be on mine. No skin off my nose either way, though I get the feeling you’re going to have a hard time if you don’t get something more than bread into you soon.”

Finally, the girl looked up, and her eyes were wide and frightened. They were the same eyes as a deer when it caught sight of a hunter but didn't know what that meant. She didn't speak, but the message was clear. She would accept his help.

Will nodded and stood, swinging his bag back over his shoulder and gesturing for her to follow him. She fell in step behind him, keeping enough distance he wouldn't be able to hurt her without giving her a fighting chance. Will decided she was clever.

"It's alright with me if you don't talk much," Will said as they walked, "I don't get much company out here, so it won't be any different from usual if you're quiet as the trees all the time. I do have a dog, but he got into a tussle with a badger last week so he's out of commission at the moment. You'll meet him when we get to the house. I say house, but it's more of a hut or shack. Mostly I just call it home."

Will could feel the girl warming up to him as they walked, whether from the fact that he had yet to attack her or because he sounded friendly enough, he couldn't be sure.

"I don't know how long you've had those scratches, but if we catch them soon enough I can keep them from festering and causing you more trouble. I had a dog once who got a cut on his leg infected. It got to the point where he lost the leg, but he walked fine with three after a few months of healing up. If that doesn't attest to my ability with medicine, I guess there isn't much that will convince you."

Will could feel her doubt, and he almost laughed.

"I bet you're thinking I can't be that good if I couldn't save the leg," Will said with a smile, "the dog in question wasn't the sharpest knife in the kitchen. He kept chewing off the bandages. It didn't help that he liked to roll in unsanitary things. He was lucky the leg was the only thing he lost. I had to keep him in the house for his entire recovery after it was gone so he wouldn't do it again."

The girl didn't reply to that either. Will wondered if she was worried about her own injuries, concerned by potential infection. He would offer his help to her in any way she would accept, and he would do his best. He couldn't guarantee anything, of course, but from the glimpse he'd gotten he believed she didn't have much to worry about.

They reached his little hut, and Will beckoned her inside. The girl followed, still silent, as Will unlatched the door and swung it open.

Winston woofed happily from his bed, tail thumping excitedly. Will smiled and dropped his bag on the table before going over to his canine companion. Winston grinned up at him and Will crouched to ruffle his fur at the scruff.

"How you doing, boy?" Will asked softly, checking the bandages on Winston's front legs, "get into trouble while I was out?"

Winston woofed again before he tipped his head at the girl. If anyone had ever asked Will, he would have said dogs were just about as intelligent as humans, maybe smarter than most.

Winston was even smarter than most dogs, and Will would confess he was his favorite so far of all his canine friends.

“She’s here so I can patch her up, too,” Will confided to the dog, “you know I have a soft spot for strays.”

Winston made a soft grumbling sound, but Will felt it was an agreement. He gave a sharp nod and stood back up. When he turned around, he saw the girl was smiling at Winston, and he smiled back.

“I guess you like dogs enough, then,” he said, “if you give me a minute to put away the things I gathered, I can get to your hands. Make yourself comfortable. Introduce yourself to Winston if you like. He’s quite a charmer. Better looking than me, at least.”

The girl’s smile widened and she moved over to let Winston smell her hand. Will was satisfied with that, so he began to sort out his herbs and roots into his little clay pots. The girl still didn’t say anything, didn’t make a sound, but Winston seemed to like her well enough and Winston was a good judge of character.

When Will was done, he set out some supplies on the table and beckoned her back over. She sat in a chair and he sat facing her.

“First things first, I’ll clean these up and see how bad they really are,” Will explained, wanting to make sure she understood what he was doing so she wouldn’t be spooked by anything, “then I’ll add something to keep them clean and promote healing. I’ll wrap them up and we’ll be good as gold.”

The girl didn’t respond. She didn’t so much as nod in acknowledgement. She just allowed Will to gently wash her hands and inspect the scratches. Most of them were merely superficial, but there were a few that went deeper, and Will paid particular interest in them.

“I’d really like to know what a girl like you’re doing out here in my neck of the woods,” Will said gently, hoping he wouldn’t need to stitch her up but seeing he probably would.

“My dad went crazy and killed a bunch of people.”

Will stopped his movements and looked up at the girl. He hadn’t really expected her to say anything, and he was surprised to hear the cold certainty in her voice. She didn’t sound frightened, though he thought she had every right to be. Her expression was calm and calculated, probably waiting to see his reaction to her words.

Will just looked at her with open curiosity. She would find no judgment here.

“People think I’m either a witch or cursed,” she continued, “I couldn’t stay in town after they killed him.”

Will nodded and continued with his work.

“That sounds like a good reason to be in the woods,” he told her, “and you seem clever. Would you mind telling me your name?”

The girl looked at him for a long moment, and Will didn't know if she would answer this question. He wouldn't force her to talk, but he did hope she would be comfortable enough to do so.

"Abigail."

Will smiled. He didn't need to know her family name. The name she shared with her father. He didn't care. If she wanted to leave that behind, he would let her.

"I'm Will," he told her, "and I'm sorry Abigail, but I think this is going to need stitches."

Abigail didn't flinch. She didn't cry. She didn't react at all as Will stitched her up and then wrapped her hands. She had clearly dealt with things in her life that she wasn't prepared to discuss, and Will was fine with that.

Will explained everything he was doing, and the functions of each of the herbs he used. He could see that it fascinated her, and he was glad. She was smart, and he hoped she would remember these things so she could heal herself in the future.

Will hadn't been lying when he said he had a soft spot for strays, and this girl seemed as lost and alone as they get. He was glad he could help her, even if it was just treating her cuts. He'd done this for a few creatures, though not many people. Mostly dogs, and some of them decided to stick around with him after they healed. Others made their way back out into the world, and he hoped they survived on their own.

With this girl, he couldn't tell yet if she would be one to stick around, or if she would decide she'd be better off on her own, but he would treat her just the same. He would do what he could, and she was free to make her own decisions.

The Visit

Chapter Notes

A little more context and backstory.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Why do you live out here by yourself?"

Will huffed a soft laugh. Abigail didn't talk much, but she always had something to say when she did. And that sure was a question to marinate on. He was sure it had been niggling at her for a few days already.

Abigail had stuck around so far, but Will was sure she was still debating on heading out on her own again. She had taken to coming with him to gather things, and listened intently when he explained what they were good for and how to use them. Will was finding he enjoyed having her around, though he hadn't really been lonely before.

"That's a good question," Will told her, kneeling to harvest a group of mushrooms from the side of a stump, "and with anyone else I'd be worried they would judge me for the answer."

Will glanced at Abigail, and saw she had tipped her head curiously. Understanding flickered over her features, but didn't quell her curiosity. He smiled softly and turned back to the task at hand.

"The heart of the matter is that people don't like me," Will told her, "I make them uncomfortable. After a while, I decided I didn't have anything keeping me in the village, and it would be better for everyone if I went my own way. I doubt any of them even realize I'm still alive out here."

Abigail didn't reply to that, but Will had a pretty good idea of what she was thinking.

From what he had been able to gather, the village had turned against her the moment her father was identified as the killer. They had persecuted her and driven her from her home, threatening to burn her at the stake or perform a witch trial. Now, she was probably debating whether she would try to find a home in the woods as he had, or if she would find another village and try to make a place for herself there. If the people from her past home believed her to be dead, all the better. That meant they wouldn't come looking for her.

Regardless, Abigail would be relieved if she could leave the entirety of her past behind her and move forward.

Will continued with his gathering for a while before Abigail spoke up again.

“How long have you been alone?”

Will smiled.

“If you’re trying to say my people skills are rusty, they were never polished. I’ve never been good with people. Part of the reason they didn’t like me. If you’re honestly wondering how long it’s been since I left, I reckon it’s been about fifteen years,” he answered, not bothering to glance up to see her reaction to that.

Abigail didn’t reply for a long moment, and Will thought maybe that was the end of the questioning for the day. She was slowly opening up to him, but he knew she was still wary of anyone with two thumbs and a heartbeat.

“You’ve been all on your own that whole time?” she asked at length, sounding as if she pitied him.

Will sighed and shook his head.

“You’re fitting to bleed me dry of all my secrets,” he said, “How am I supposed to be the mysterious woodsman if you learn everything about me?”

Abigail didn’t reply, but he hadn’t expected her to. He knew she wouldn’t talk again until her question was answered. He supposed it was a clever way she had of getting information.

“Alright,” Will conceded, “I’m not always on my own. Every now and then someone wanders into the woods, like you did, and I treat them to the same hospitality as long as they keep their manners. And then there’s Hannibal. He comes around every so often as well. He’s the only one I can really call my friend.”

Abigail tipped her head. Will understood she would be curious. He didn’t talk about Hannibal, hadn’t ever mentioned him to her before. She had every right to be curious, but she wasn’t going to get any answers about that today. At least not from him.

“Who’s Hannibal?” she asked.

Will shook his head and stood up, shifting his bag onto his shoulder.

“That’s one thing I’m keeping a secret for now,” he said, “Hannibal’s more private than I am, and I don’t make a habit of telling people about him. If you stick around long enough, maybe you’ll be here when he comes by.”

Abigail wasn’t happy with that, but she seemed resigned to the idea that he wouldn’t say more.

They finished gathering herbs and ingredients, and Will pulled a few rabbits from his snares before they headed back.

The first time he had brought back a rabbit, he had offered to teach Abigail to skin and prepare it, but she had turned pale and shook her head adamantly. Since then, he had learned

she already knew how, and was excellent with a knife. His initial impression that she knew how to use a knife had been correct, and it made him wonder.

Abigail's father had killed a bunch of people, but she hadn't gone into any further detail with that. Will didn't expect her to, wouldn't ask her to if she didn't want to, but he was still curious.

Abigail's initial aversion to skinning and preparing rabbits made Will think her father had done more than just kill people, and Abigail had been well aware of it. He guessed her father had been a hunter, and had eaten his kills. He had fed them to Abigail. If Will was right, he had also had Abigail help him prepare the kills.

Will could understand why Abigail didn't tell him such things, and why the villagers had run her out of town if they'd found out. He wasn't bothered by it, and wouldn't tell Abigail he knew anything. She felt safe with him, and he didn't want to jeopardize that by making her worried about what he thought of her. If she ever wanted to tell him, he would be ready.

Winston ran ahead of them to the hut, his tail wagging excitedly. His limp was nearly gone, and Will knew he was getting better.

Will could feel it, a change, and he knew Winston had known even before him. There was something different about the forest directly around the hut, and different about the air.

Will grinned, and he saw Abigail frown in confusion.

"Don't worry," Will told her, "It's Hannibal."

Will resisted the urge to run to the door of his home like an excited child. He managed, barely.

Hannibal was sitting on Will's bed, admiring his notes on herbs and mushrooms he had been keeping for years. He looked up and smiled when Will opened the door, and Will went to him quickly.

"It has been a while," Hannibal said pleasantly, setting the book aside and resting his hands on Will's hips.

"Yes," Will said, pressing his forehead to Hannibal's, with a soft sigh.

Being with Hannibal always felt like coming home. Will hated being apart, but he knew it was necessary. He knew why Hannibal couldn't stay with him all the time, but he ached for him regardless.

"Are you not going to introduce me to your new friend?" Hannibal asked with a soft huff of laughter.

Will sighed, but pulled away. Abigail was standing in the doorway, staring at them both with wide eyes. Winston was sitting at her feet, allowing Will and Hannibal to have some space while he offered comfort to the girl.

“Sorry about that,” Will said to Abigail, offering a smile, “I told you I’m not practiced with people. This is Hannibal. Hannibal, this is Abigail. She’s been staying here until she decides where she wants to go.”

Hannibal smiled and stood up, snaking one arm around Will’s waist so he could extend the other to Abigail. Abigail chewed on her lower lip, but took his hand without hesitation.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Hannibal told her, “I worry that Will is alone so often, so thank you for keeping him company while I have been gone.”

Abigail nodded, but she didn’t say anything.

Will didn’t blame her. Hannibal was intimidating to anyone, especially on the first meeting. Not that he had really expected her to talk. She hadn’t spoken much in the time she had been there, and throwing someone new into the mix would make her nervous regardless.

“Winston,” Will called, grinning as the dog jumped up and trotted to him, “aw, he’s missed you too, Hannibal.”

Winston woofed lowly and sniffed at Hannibal curiously before licking the hand Hannibal offered to him.

“I’m pleased to see you too,” Hannibal promised Winston, though Will could tell he wasn’t thrilled to be licked. Hannibal wasn’t overly fond of dogs, but he tried for Will. It was one of the things Will adored about him.

Abigail took Will’s sleeve and gave it a gentle tug, and Will knew she wanted to talk to him without Hannibal. He nodded to her once and held up a finger.

“Give me a second with Abigail,” Will told Hannibal, pressing a kiss to his cheek before pulling away and leaving the house with Abigail.

Abigail shut the door behind them and pulled Will away to where she probably thought was out of Hannibal’s earshot. Even just being out here when Will knew Hannibal was in the house made Will anxious to get back to him. He didn’t get to see Hannibal often, and he didn’t want to be apart from him while he was in the area.

“What’s wrong, Abigail?” Will asked, honestly concerned because she looked so pale and worried.

Abigail took a deep breath and shook her head.

“Hannibal’s a monster?”

Chapter End Notes

And Hannibal appears at last *^^*
Enjoy <3

The Monster

“What is he? Is he a Wechuge? A ghoul? A- a sigbin? Tell me. That thing in there is no man, and I can’t believe you let it touch you like that. What is wrong with you?”

Abigail was nearing hysterics, and Will was admittedly impressed.

“You sure know your stuff,” he said, “what’s a shy village girl like you doing with all the names of those creatures in your head?”

Abigail pressed her lips together. She wasn’t happy.

“Don’t change the subject, Will,” she snapped, “that’s a monster, in your home. You owe me an explanation.”

Will let his own smile drop.

“No, Abigail, I don’t think I do,” he said lowly, “if anything, you owe *me* . I helped you, and I haven’t demanded answers about your life or your past, and I’ve liked having you around. Don’t think keeping me company means I’m in your debt now.”

Abigail’s eyes grew wide, and Will could see the fear behind them. She was afraid of him, and she had every right to be.

“If you’d like to leave, you are welcome to. I am not keeping you here, and you’ve known that all along. If you would like to try being polite, I’ll make some tea and soup.”

Will turned and headed back to the house, letting Abigail make her decision. Hannibal was on the bed again, seeming to be in the middle of a deep conversation with Winston.

Will laughed and shook his head as he opened up his bag and got busy putting away what he had gathered. He had temporarily postponed his usual routine when he had realized Hannibal was there, but he wouldn’t neglect it for long. He was a creature of habit, and he was in the habit of putting everything where it belonged.

“Am I causing trouble with your friend?” Hannibal asked, and he sounded somewhat resigned to the idea, even regretful.

Will hated that.

“No. If anything, she’s causing trouble for me,” he said, “She’s staying with me, doesn’t seem to have any plans to move on, eating my food. You know, she won’t even skin a rabbit, and she has this thing about deer-”

“Will.”

Will stopped talking, knowing Hannibal could see right through him. Hannibal had always been able to see when Will was avoiding something, or when he was upset. Hannibal knew

Will better than Will knew himself, and it was frustrating sometimes.

Will set his hands on the shelf he had been organizing and shut his eyes. He didn't want to have to talk to Hannibal about this. He just wanted to be happy Hannibal was there.

"What did she say to you that has upset you so?" Hannibal asked, and his voice was right in Will's ear. His arms wrapped around Will's waist and he set his chin on Will's shoulder.

Will sighed and shook his head.

"Nothing," he lied, "I bet she ran off to find some other town where she can blend in and not have to worry about anyone knowing what her dad did, or what she might have done, or people like me."

Hannibal nuzzled at Will's neck, and gently bit Will's ear.

"You know lies do not fool me," Hannibal said softly, "not when it's you."

Will dropped his head.

"You saying other people can lie to you and get away with it?" Will asked, still fighting the war he knew was lost.

Hannibal hummed, and the sound was a low vibration against Will's spine. Will turned around in Hannibal's grip, and their foreheads were pressing together again. Will still didn't open his eyes, just breathed Hannibal's air for a moment.

"Not at all," Hannibal whispered, "but I know how much you enjoy being unique."

Will huffed.

"Well, just for that, I insist on being the one to make dinner tonight."

Hannibal tisked softly, but his grip on Will tightened a bit.

"I would be delighted, but first you must tell me what has you so upset," Hannibal said, his tone admonishing.

Will opened his eyes, and they were immediately caught by Hannibal's. He loved Hannibal's eyes. They were a deep burgundy, they looked red or black in the dark, but shone golden in the light. It was one of the first things Will had noticed that made him realize Hannibal wasn't human. No human had eyes like that.

"She called you a monster," Will confessed.

Hannibal smiled.

"She is not wrong, in that respect," Hannibal said, then tipped his head when he saw the way Will's expression changed, "But that's not what bothered you about it."

Will bit the inside of his cheek, not wanting to admit to anything. Hannibal always managed to get him to talk, even when Will didn't want to. It was infuriating. Will sometimes wondered if Hannibal was using magic on him to get him to talk, but he honestly knew that wasn't necessary. Hannibal didn't have to play tricks. He just had to ask.

"No," Will confessed, "I'm bothered because she said it like it's a bad thing. I'm bothered because she knew too much about creatures like you. I'm bothered because what if she tries to hurt you? Because of her fear. She doesn't know you, and she's afraid of you."

Hannibal smiled warmly, pleased Will had told him what was wrong. He leaned forward and caught Will in a kiss that Will returned like a starved man. He may have been irritated with Hannibal, but that didn't change the fact that it had been far too long since they had seen each other. Additionally, Will's true ire had been directed elsewhere to begin with.

"Do you fear for my safety so much?" Hannibal asked, nuzzling at Will's neck, "do you perceive me as so vulnerable a child such as her could pose a threat?"

Will sighed and shook his head.

"I don't see you as weak, Hannibal. You know that. But I never know what you're up to when you're gone and I know you're not invulnerable. You can be hurt. I know it. I hate the idea of you being hurt, even though I know it would be difficult for anyone to hurt you. But she also knows things about creatures like you, and I'm worried she knows something about how to hurt you."

Hannibal sighed softly, his breath warm against Will's neck.

"What would you have me do?" he asked.

Will didn't know. He didn't think there was anything he could ask Hannibal to do about it. If Abigail was already in a town or village, there wasn't much they could do. Hannibal could kill her, but Will didn't want that.

They would have to just wait. Wait and hope she didn't do anything.

"Nothing," he said, "Let's just see how this turns out."

Hannibal smiled against the skin under Will's ear.

"As you wish," he said.

—

Will stepped out of his house, taking in a deep breath of the morning air.

He could sense Abigail nearby. She hadn't run off to a village to tell them all about the monster she had discovered in the woods. That was promising, but Will knew it wasn't yet a decision on her part.

Will gathered an armload of wood from the pile against the side of the house and brought it in so Hannibal could make breakfast.

Hannibal preferred to be the one who cooked when he was with Will. He had nothing against Will's cooking, and never complained when Will cooked for them, but Will usually let him anyway. Hannibal loved to see Will eat what he cooked, and Will would readily admit Hannibal's cooking was about a hundred times better than his own.

If anyone else heard of such a thing, particularly those in the town, they would think Hannibal was a fae, and that meant Will was being enchanted or cursed by the food.

Will didn't think that was it, but he wouldn't have much cared if it was. Hannibal had no intention of harming Will, and Will clearly had nothing wrong with being around Hannibal, regardless of what he was.

Hannibal was mixing some herbs when Will entered, making a kind of tea. He smiled warmly when Will appeared in the door, and Will couldn't help but return it.

"You know, she offered up a couple names for what she thinks you are," Will said as he set the wood down and got to work loading the stove.

Hannibal raised a quizzical eyebrow, his expression amused.

Will huffed a laugh.

"Wechuge, ghoul, sigbin, all the names she could think up," Will continued, "I'm impressed she narrowed it down to such a specific kind of creature, even if you aren't any of those."

Hannibal nodded as he set the kettle of water on the stove and knelt beside Will. He lit the fire with the snap of his fingers, and kissed Will's hand.

"Impressive indeed. I would suspect she has some experience with such creatures. Little does she know, not everything has been discovered by humans."

Will huffed another laugh. Hannibal stood and continued with his preparations. Will watched him, feeling that familiar ache in his chest that demanded even more closeness. It was always strongest when Hannibal was within reach. When Hannibal was far away, it was not so painful, though it was ever present.

Will didn't think that was magic either.

"I'm pretty sure it was her father," Will said, "I think he killed and ate girls. She doesn't talk much, and only mentioned him once, but I've got a few ideas about it anyway."

Hannibal nodded, smiling. He was almost always smiling when he was with Will, though Will knew he didn't smile nearly that much when they were apart. When they had first met, Will thought he never really smiled.

"Of course," Hannibal said, "you have a remarkable ability to see things others cannot. There is very little that can hide from you."

Will waved it off.

“That’s not the point. The point is, her experience with creatures like that is not good. She was afraid of her father, then run out of town because of him. I understand why she’s nervous about you.”

Hannibal nodded again.

“It is understandable for any human to fear me. It would have been understandable if you had feared me.”

Will grinned.

He had never been afraid of Hannibal. Sometimes he thought that might be why Hannibal hadn’t killed him immediately.

“All I’m trying to say is, we need to let her see you’re not one of those things she fears. Show her she doesn’t have to fear you,” Will said, “And I guess we’ll have to convince her I’m not under any spell. If we can.”

Hannibal gave his own laugh, looking at Will with such warmth it momentarily satisfied that ache for closeness.

“Do you ever believe I may have bewitched you?” he asked.

Will sat in a chair, watching Hannibal and feeling as if all was right with the world. He couldn’t be worried about Abigail and what she might do, because Hannibal was there, making food for them while Winston limped over to the stove to sit beside it and soak up some warmth. It was exactly as the world should be.

“You wouldn’t have to,” Will said honestly, “if I met a human that looks like you, who talks and acts like you, I’d feel the same way about them.”

Will smiled a bit sadly.

“Though, they would probably be around a bit more often than you are.”

Hannibal frowned.

Will felt guilty for that. He hated to make Hannibal frown. Especially because they never had very long together.

“I do apologize, Will,” Hannibal said softly, “I wish I could stay with you always.”

Will sighed. He knew Hannibal had to leave. He knew Hannibal wouldn’t tell him why. He knew it, but it still hurt him every time he remembered Hannibal would have to leave. He never wanted to be away from Hannibal. He just wished there was some way for it.

“I know,” Will replied, wishing he didn’t sound so upset. He really didn’t want to make Hannibal upset as well. “It’s just- I miss you. Even right now, I miss you because you’re six

feet away from me. I miss you when you're here, and when you're away. It hurts. Sometimes I wonder if it would have been better if I'd never found you. But I can't convince myself to want that. Even if it would hurt less."

Hannibal came to Will, then. His movements were as silent as a shadow, but he was there, kneeling at Will's feet.

"Will Graham," he said, like a prayer, "you are the only thing in this world I have ever desired. If you will only wait for me a few days longer, that pain will come to an end."

Will smiled. He had no idea what Hannibal was talking about. He didn't know what it meant. But he nodded.

"I'm always waiting for you," he said, "what's a few days compared to eternity?"

Hannibal kissed him.

The Village

Will set out a plate with some bread and meat on a stump. In case Abigail got hungry while she watched him from a distance. It had been a few days since she had decided to give them some space, and Will hadn't caught sight of her. But he knew she was there. He could feel her eyes on him whenever he left the house.

He hoped she would show herself sooner rather than later.

"Will," Hannibal called from the doorway, "I believe Winston is ready to have his bandages removed."

Will turned back, rolling his eyes a bit.

Whenever Hannibal was around, Will and the dogs seemed to heal faster. Neither of them had ever mentioned it, but Will thought Hannibal must know he had noticed.

Winston was standing in the doorway at Hannibal's feet, his tail wagging and his tongue lolling happily.

"Alright," Will said, returning and crouching down to look, "let's see what we have here, sir."

Will unwrapped Winston's legs, and smiled at the fresh, healthy skin and fur he saw there. Minimal scarring, as far as he could tell. Another indication of Hannibal's intervention.

"Looks like you're ready to go," Will said with a nod, "why don't we check the traps?"

Will stood back up, and was immediately caught by Hannibal's strong arms. Hannibal pulled Will to him and stole his breath with a devouring kiss. Will felt the ache in his chest burst like a flurry of snowflakes, and he pulled Hannibal closer.

"I must be on my way, Mangusteli," Hannibal whispered when they broke apart, and Will immediately felt his heart drop into his shoes, "I will return in a few days. We will not be parted for long, I swear it."

Will smiled and nodded, though he wanted nothing more than to hold Hannibal tight and keep him from leaving. It was how he always felt when Hannibal had to leave him.

The world was cruel.

"I trust you, Hannibal," he said.

Hannibal kissed him again, and then he was gone. Will was left there, feeling empty and alone.

—

"It left."

Will felt his entire body tense. He was in a very bad mood, now, because Hannibal was gone. He tried to find some secret store of patience so he could deal with this.

Will turned to where Abigail had emerged from among the trees. She was crouched to pet Winston, but she was watching Will warily.

“Yeah,” Will said, “Hannibal had to leave again. You can call him a he, if you want. It’s rude to talk about someone as if they’re a dead log.”

Abigail pressed her lips together in a frown.

“What is he?” she asked.

That made Will smile, though it was sad and bitter.

“You’d have to ask him,” he said, “but you refused to talk to him at all. He was here for four days. You could have come by and talked to him. You could have seen that he’s good.”

Abigail’s frown deepened, her brow furrowing.

“He could put a spell on me if I let him talk to me,” she said, “at least, he might be able to. I don’t know what he is, so I don’t know what rules he follows.”

Will sighed.

“He’s not anything you can know about. He’s not anything anyone knows about. He doesn’t follow any rules. Hannibal is an entity unto himself. But he’s not evil.”

Will leveled Abigail with a look.

“He’s the only one who has ever fully accepted me. He’s good.”

Abigail swallowed. She wasn’t convinced.

“Will, don’t you see how dangerous this is?” she asked, “whatever he is, he’s powerful, and dangerous.”

Will shook his head and went back to what he was doing, resetting the snare he had just pulled a rabbit from. Winston sniffed around in the foliage nearby.

“He might be dangerous, but not to me. He has never been dangerous to me. If you just talked to him, you might find he’s not dangerous to you either. He’ll be back in a few days, and you can see then.”

Abigail stood quickly, making Winston snap his head up to see what the matter was.

“I’m sorry, Will,” she said, shaking her head, “but I can’t be here when he gets back. I can’t be around him.”

Will didn't answer. He was sad to see her go, but he didn't try to stop her. Abigail just headed off into the trees. Probably looking for a village to settle into.

So Will was left alone again. Alone with his dog.

Will sighed and stood up, the snare set and waiting for whatever might stumble into it. Winston trotted over to stand by Will, waiting to go to the next snare.

Will headed off, cursing his luck. He couldn't seem to keep anyone.

—

Will heard them before he saw them.

The crash of footfalls through the forest, coming towards his home, was loud and nearly impossible to miss. It was accompanied by the sound of angry voices.

Will knew what it meant, and he opened the door.

"Go," he commanded, and Winston took off into the woods in the opposite direction of the sounds, which now included angry shouting, calling for Will.

Winston would be safe.

And Will turned to his shelves, prepared to defend his home.

Hannibal had not returned yet, but Will fully intended to still be here when he did.

Will started a fire in the stove and tied a cloth around his face. He opened the vents he had made to channel the smoke out the sides of the house rather than the roof, and tossed the contents of one of his jars onto the flame.

Will quickly shut the door of the stove, knowing it wouldn't stop all the smoke but hoping it would stop enough that he would be safe for the time being.

Will heard a shout, as someone noticed the smoke, and they all turned to follow it to his position.

Exactly as Will expected.

Will gathered a few more jars, filling his pockets with them.

He had been gathering these for years, in the hopes he would never have to use them. He had held that hope, even as he knew it was likely to someday be necessary. He was unliked, and staying in one place for so long was a gamble.

One he had lost today.

"Come out of there!" a voice called. Not one he recognized, though that wasn't a surprise. He didn't know anyone. "We know where you are, and we're not going to let you endanger us

any longer! We don't abide by witches!"

A witch. Ha. That was what they thought he was. They thought he was out here, practicing witchcraft and cursing them all from his little hut.

They would know soon enough, witches were not what they should be afraid of. He had no magic, but he could curse them just as well.

Will opened the door of his house and saw the wind had been nearly absent, letting his smoke linger as a mist around the area. Perfect for what he wanted to accomplish. They were all breathing it in, and most were coughing at the strange taste of it in their mouths. It was no ordinary smoke. But they wouldn't know what that meant just yet. Most would never find out.

"If I am a witch," Will called to them, his voice slightly muffled from the fabric over his mouth and nose, "then who has helped me? Every witch must have a familiar. Do you see any with me?"

The crowd stopped, looking around. Winston was long gone, and Will had no other animals at the moment. This was to his advantage.

"My familiar is currently in the form of a human," he said, spreading his arms wide to gesture to all of them, and to show he had no weapons in hand, "so which one of your compatriots is only luring you to me?"

The crowd, armed with the typical torches and farm tools, looked around nervously at their company. Most moved further away from whoever they were near, unsure if anyone could be trusted.

"He's trying to bewitch us!" the man who seemed to be the leader shouted at them all, his crudely carved cross swinging around his neck, "do not listen! Repeat the prayer in your mind, or aloud, and it will protect you!"

Will laughed. He didn't bother stifling it. It went well with the image he meant to show.

"God is not in this place," he replied, "he will not save you from me."

Will put his hand into his pocket. By his calculations, they had been breathing it in nearly long enough. Most of the crowd began mumbling the lord's prayer, their voices joining into a soft rumble of sound beneath everything else.

"Why do you cover your face?" the leader asked, stepping forward, "to conceal your identity from us?"

A lot of good that would have done. Will was the only person who lived out here. They wouldn't have been fooled by a disguise, much less this strip of cloth he had chosen. Either their fear made them foolish, or their foolishness had driven them to be afraid. Regardless, they were in Will's domain now. He had the advantage.

“I don’t care to hide from the likes of you,” Will answered, withdrawing his hand with a small opened jar clasped in it, “I just happen to know something you do not. Look at your companions.”

All of them turned to look at whoever was around them. Now, things would be changing. The smoke would be playing tricks on their mind. It also tended to cause paranoia, along with the hallucinations. It would show them the things they feared most.

A few screams erupted, and several of the men lashed out with their weapons, attacking the person nearest them rather than who they had come out here to get. The leader refused to turn, though he was twitching as his mind showed him horrors beyond his darkest nightmares. He was staring at Will, taking careful steps forward as he lifted his ax.

“When I kill you, these tricks will all disappear,” the man said.

Will grinned, though the man couldn’t see it. He couldn’t help it.

“If you kill me, you are going to die a slow and painful death,” he said, sure it was true without knowing exactly what would be the cause.

The contents of his pockets could do it, if everything aligned to cause it. If not, Will was sure Hannibal would suffice.

The man shook his head, coming into Will’s immediate range likely without realizing it. He was wielding an ax, and seemed to be preparing to use it.

“Our father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.”

Will couldn’t help it. He laughed again. The man was praying at him, like the words would protect him from what Will could do.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Will threw the contents of the jar onto the man. A white powder bloomed out from his hand and covered the man from head to foot. If it had been silent, Will knew he would have been able to hear the man’s skin sizzling where the powder landed.

The man screamed and dropped his ax onto the ground. He lifted his hands to his face, but the flesh there was also burning.

Will dropped the now empty jar onto the ground beside the man as he walked past, preparing for the next soul brave enough to approach him.

“And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us,” Will said, his tone mocking as he continued the man’s unfinished prayer.

One woman, tall and strong, ran toward him, though her eyes were not seeing. She was looking at something that was not there, though she would kill him if he did nothing.

“Do not lead us to the time of trial,” Will said, taking out another jar and opening it, “But rescue us from the evil one.”

Will laughed loudly, sidestepping a wild swing with a pitchfork as he threw the contents of the jar onto the woman as she charged past. The dark liquid splashed across her face and stuck like tar, and Will knew it would hurt like the very devil himself.

“For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,” Will watched as a pair of men ran toward him, their eyes shut and only following the sound of his mocking prayer. They each had large pieces of wood they wielded as clubs, and Will thought they must be brothers.

“For ever and ever,” Will said, throwing a jar at each of them and watching as the glass was shattered by their weapons, pouring the contents onto the men and making them scream in shock and fear, followed by agony as they stumbled away.

“Amen.”

Most of the crowd were dead or dying, either from Will’s attacks or those of their companions. The remaining few had fled into the woods, hoping to find their way back to the village despite the wild hallucinations they were being afflicted with.

Will was safe. At least for the moment. He was under no illusion they would leave him be after this. He would have to move on.

Will was studying the aftermath, trying to decide the best way to go about cleaning it up, when a familiar voice spoke up.

“I thought you might use that smoke against them.”

Will turned to face Abigail.

The Last

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abigail looked different. She looked darker, in some way, as if shadows clung to her. She didn't have a cloth around her face to protect her from the smoke, yet she seemed unaffected.

Will was on guard.

"You sent them here," he said, and Abigail didn't deny it.

"You associate with a monster," she replied, "a man eater."

Will huffed and shook his head, reaching into his pocket for another jar, though he hoped he wouldn't have to use it. He did like her, even if she had done this.

"You don't even know what he is, and you are making these accusations against him. Maybe I'm not the real witch in this situation."

Abigail smiled, and it wasn't the gentle smile Will had earned a few times while she had been staying with him. It was a cruel thing.

"I never said I was not a witch," she said, and Will knew that was true enough, "and you never asked."

Will shrugged.

"I would not have cared," he said, "I would have treated you just the same. But you have decided I am a monster because of Hannibal."

Abigail scowled.

"You are not a monster, Will," she said, "but you have been bewitched by one. You are his servant, and cannot be allowed to continue."

Will thought that was just about the most ridiculous thing he had ever heard. He was Hannibal's servant just as much as Abigail was Will's servant. Not at all. Never. In no way.

Will pulled his hand from his pocket and threw the contents of the jar at Abigail. They shouldn't kill her, but at least temporarily incapacitate her.

The powder fell down in the still air, landing on nothing but the ground and the grass. Abigail had vanished.

"Will."

Will whirled around, plunging his hand back into his pocket, searching for his depleting resources.

Abigail was there. Closer now, but in a different direction. He had not seen her move. Hannibal could do that as well, but he had not done so to Will in many years. It was saved for when he hunted, Hannibal said.

“Are you hunting me?” Will asked.

Abigail’s lips twitched, as if she wanted to smile.

“No. If I were hunting you, not only would you already be dead, but I would intend to eat you. You are contaminated. I would not risk contaminating myself. I do not wish to risk you contaminating anyone else.”

If Will had thought he had time to argue with her, he would have pointed out that he had been out here for years, and never “contaminated” anyone. He didn’t think he did, though, and knew he was at a disadvantage. Abigail had some kind of magic, and she intended to kill him.

Oh.

She thought he *had* contaminated someone. Perhaps her father had hunted in these woods. Perhaps he had returned one day, markedly changed. Then, he began killing girls. She thought it was because of Will and Hannibal.

Will was saddened by the thought, but also knew he had no way to prove his own innocence.

This last jar contained a powder that would only make her sleep. It was strong, and acted fast, but Will couldn’t be sure if it would work on her. She may be protected.

“I am sorry it has to end this way between us,” Will said, slowly drawing the jar from his pocket, “I enjoyed your company. I enjoyed teaching you. But I do not intend to let you kill me for something I have not done. If I die, I will fight.”

Abigail began walking slowly towards Will, confident.

Will threw the powder at her, but Abigail raised her hand and the powder froze in the air, as if time itself had stopped.

“You’re out of the really dangerous items,” she noted, then flicked her hand towards him.

The powder was flung into Will’s face, even as he turned his head to the side. His eyes were closed, and he held his breath. He felt the powder settle on his skin, and didn’t inhale in the case some of it permeated the cloth over his mouth and nose.

When Will turned back, opening his dusty eyelids, Abigail was there. She was close enough he could have felt her breath. He wasn’t sure she was breathing.

“I’m sorry.”

It was a whisper, and paired with the sensation of a blade entering Will's abdomen. Abigail pulled the knife across his belly, and Will felt as if time really had stopped, now. It had at least slowed, as Abigail pulled the knife from his flesh and stepped away. Will fell to his knees and lifted his hand to see his own blood there.

"Hannibal," he said, not a shout or cry, but as if he was merely mentioning him in casual conversation.

Will's vision began to fade.

He heard a vicious snarl, and saw something tear Abigail to pieces, as he fell into blackness.

—

Something cold and wet moved against Will's cheek, rousing him from the darkness. He pried his eyes open to see Winston, his nose snuffling at Will curiously.

"Hey," Will croaked, smiling a bit, "where are we, boy? How the hell did I survive?"

"Forgive me, Will."

Will turned his head to see Hannibal, kneeling at his other side.

"I had intended for it to be something you chose, not a necessity. I was already on my way to you when I heard your call. If I had been there sooner, this would not have happened."

Will took in a deep breath, surprised that it didn't hurt. He felt fine, although different. His throat was dry, but not rough. He didn't have a single pain in his body. But there was something entirely different about every sensation. Colors were different. Brighter, maybe. He could hear things he didn't think he should be able to hear.

"What was the choice?" Will asked.

Hannibal smiled, a bit sheepishly. It was clear he was pleased.

"To become like me," he replied.

Will sat up and looked down at his hands. His fingers were black, and ended in sharp claws. His skin was dark, nearly reflective like obsidian. There was a jagged line across his stomach, where Abigail's knife had slashed him, and it glittered like silver. Will raised his hand to his head and felt the antlers there. They were hard and sharp, and just from feeling them he knew they were not as large as Hannibal's set.

"You changed me?" Will asked, "I did not know that was an option."

Hannibal smiled.

"It has not always been," he explained, "When I knew I wanted it, I began the process. But it took time, Mangusteli. That is why I had not told you before. The final step, you could have

refused or accepted. I did not want to make you wait, if you wanted it. And if you did not, you would never have known I had done anything."

Will huffed.

"What a wicked thing you are," he said, sliding his legs off the bed and pulling closer to Hannibal, "what a dirty trick you intended to play. Whatever is to be done about that?"

Hannibal said nothing, his eyes wide and admiring as he watched Will rise above him in his new form. Will drew nearer, taking Hannibal's face into his new hands and humming in thought.

Will pressed one of his new, sharp claws against Hannibal's lower lip. A bead of blood welled there, and Will ducked his head to suck it away. Hannibal still did not move. It appeared he was letting Will do what he wanted for the time being. Perhaps to atone for the misdirection he had planned.

"I want to see you," Will whispered.

Hannibal's body relaxed under Will's touch, and soon his own set of antlers rose above them as his own hands grew into claws that clutched at Will. He was not still, now.

"Always," Hannibal said.

Will grinned as Hannibal rolled them both back onto the bed.

"For ever and ever, Amen."

Chapter End Notes

Happy Halloween! I hope you enjoyed my little fic for the season.
Thanks for reading <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!